



POLITICAL PART DESHMUKHS AND DESHPANDES UNDER THE HYDERABAD STATE

Panasa Adinarayana

Dept of History, Osmania University, Hyderabad-7.

INTRODUCTION:

The socio-economic life of the people of Hyderabad and especially in Telangana was the unbridled feudal exploitation that persisted till, the beginning of the Telangana armed peasant struggle. The gradual separation of Hyderabad from the Mughal Empire was accomplished before the death of the first Nizam in 1724 A.D. It is pertinent here to take a brief look at the feudal nature of agrarian social relations in Telangana region. The basic feature that dominated the socio-economic life of the people of Hyderabad and especially in Telangana was the unbridled feudal exploitation that persisted till, the beginning of the Telangana armed peasant struggle. Out of the 53,000,000 acres in the whole of Hyderabad state about 30,000,000 acres i.e. about 60 percent were under Governmental land revenue system called Diwani or Khasla area, about 15,000,000 acres i.e. about 30 percent were under the Jagirdari system, and about 10 percent as the Nizam's own direct estate i.e. sarf-e-khas system.

The income or loot from the peasantry from the sarf-khas area, amounting to Rs. 20,000,000 annually was entirely used to meet the expenditure of the Nizam's family and its retinue. The whole area was treated as his private estate. He was not bound to spend any amount for economic and social benefit or development of people's livelihood in that area.¹

The peasants in these areas were nothing but bonded - slaves or total serfs under the Nizam. Even whatever little rights existed in the diwani area was denied to them.

The Jagir areas constituted 30 percent of the total states. In these areas, Paigas, Samasthanams, Jagirdars, Ijvards, Banjardars, Muktedars, Inamdars, or Aghahams were the various kinds of feudal complexes. Some of these used to have their own revenue officers to collect the taxes they used to impose. Some of them used to pay a small portion to the state while some others were not required to pay anything. In these areas various kinds of illegal exactions and forced labour were the normal feature. Some of these *Jagirs*, *Paigas* and *samasthanams* especially the biggest ones had their own separate police, revenue, civil and criminal systems. They were subfeudatory states, under the Nizam's state of Hyderabad which was itself a strong native state under the British princely states.²

The Paigas estates were granted to Muslims feudal, especially the Nizam's relatives, for recruiting and maintaining armed personnel to help the Nizam in his wars. The Jagirs and samasthanams were those given to reward officers, who distinguished themselves in serving the Nizam. *Maktas*, *Banjars*, *Aghahams* and *Inams* were given for various services, and these owners were entitled to fleece the peasantry and take as much as they could extract. These used to be *Deshmukhs* and *Deshpandes* who were earlier the tax collectors for the Government. Later on under the chief-ministership of Salar Jung when direct tax collection by the state apparatus was introduced, these *Deshmukhs* and *Deshpandes* were granted *vatans* or *mash* (annuities) based on percentage of the past collections, in perpetuity.

These *Deshmukhs* and *Deshpandes* as collectors of taxes grabbed thousands of acres of the best fertile cultivated land and made it their own property. The peasants cultivating these lands were reduced to the position of tenants at will.³

The feudal landlords had occupied or acquired these lands by all foul means from the ordinary people. The major portion of the lands cultivated by the peasants came to be occupied by the land lords during the first survey settlement. These people who had power in their hands got lands registered in their names without the knowledge of the peasants who were cultivating them and the peasants came to know of it only afterwards when it was too late to do anything. Thus, these feudal lords got possession of unlimited vast lands and made them their legal possession.

Even lands which were left out in possession of the peasants in the survey settlement were occupied by the landlords in the years of the economic crisis of 1920-22 and 1930-33 when the peasants either due to bad harvests or unfair prices for the crops were unable to pay the taxes. These feudal landlords used to

torture the peasants who were unable to pay the taxes and get hold of their lands. Many a time this acquisition used to take place even without the knowledge of the peasants. They used to lend agricultural products like grain, chillies, etc. to the peasants at fantastic usurious rates and later under the pretext of non-repayment of these loans, used to confiscate the lands. This was the system prevalent at the time of the Telangana struggle.⁴

The extent of concentration of lands, can be seen in the case the Jannareddi Pratap Reddy family which had one and a half lakh acres. These landlords are not only *Deshmukhs* but also village chiefs, *Patel*, *Patwari*, *Mali Patel* with hereditary rights. Each one used to be given five to ten villages as *Vatan*. These *vatan* villages were controlled through clerks or agents (*Seridars*) appointed by the *Deshmukhs*. They enjoyed the rights of an officer. These *Seridars* used to collect the products from the peasants by force, and do all other jobs including supplying all information about the village. If there are any quarrels or friction amongst the villagers, it could not be settled without the knowledge of the landlord.⁵ Depending upon the nature of the quarrel, the *Deshmukhs* used to decide whether it should be settled in his house (*gadi*) or outside in the village centre or elsewhere. If it was a small matter, the *Deshmukh's* agent would be entrusted with it, but if it was a big affair, then it was settled in the presence of the *Deshmukh* in his house. To this category of rich land lords belonged people like the Babasahebpetalandlord, Visnour Ramachandra Reddy.⁵

Pingali Venkatrama Reddy (Waddepalli *Deshmukh*) got excise contracts for the whole of Telangana all for himself. In those days excise (*Akbari*) contract meant full control over the village.

If this was the state of exploitation by the feudal lords in ryotwari areas, one can imagine what it must have been in Jagirdari areas. These Jagirdars and *Deshmukhs* had licenses for rifles and guns, had cavalry squads and armed forces as well.⁶

The *Vetti* System (forced labour) is generally taken to be confined to tribal areas or some of the most backward social communities in other areas. But in Telangana *vetti* system was an all pervasive social phenomenon affecting all classes of people in varying degrees. Each Harijan family had to send one man from the family to do *vetti*. In a small hamlet (*Palle*) each house will send one man. Their daily job consisted of household work in the house of the *Patel*, *Patwari*, *Mali Patel* or *Deshmukh*, to carry reports to police stations, taluk office (*Tehsil*) keep watch on the village *Chavadi* and the poundage. Besides these, there used to be more work for them whenever an officer came to the village *havadi*. In village *Chilkur*, daily 16 Harijans used to do *vetti*. They used to collect wood for fuel from the forests and carry post also. For carrying post or supplies they were supposed to get an *anna* for two and half miles, which were of course never honoured in practice. This system was known as "*Kosuku Veeram*" in Telugu (i.e. 1/16th of the rupee for distance of 2 1/2 miles).⁷

The worst of feudal excretion was the prevalence keeping girls as 'slaves' in landlord's houses. When landlords gave their daughters in marriage they presented these slave girls and sent them along with their married daughters, to serve them in their new homes. These slave girls were used by the landlords as concubines. The *vetti* system had made the life of the Telangana people to utter degradation and abject serfdom.⁸

Some of the notorious feudal *Deshmukhs* who owned tens of thousands of acres, against whom bitter battles were fought, during 1940 were.

1. Visunur *Deshmukh*, - land lord over 40 villages in Jangon taluk, Nalgonda district with 40,000 acres.
2. Suryapet *Deshmukh* with 20,000 acres
3. Babasahebpet *Deshmukh* with 10,000 acres, Miryalagudem taluk
4. Kalluru *Deshmukh* with 100,000 acres, Madhira Taluk, Khammam district

5. Jannareddy Pratap Reddy with 150,000 acres in, Suryapeta Taluk.⁹

Visnur Ramachandra Reddy, the notorious *Deshmukh* in Janagoan tehsil of Nalgonda district, used to forcibly seize the lands from the tenant and the peasants. He used to force the peasants in his area, of about 40 villages to do forced labour in his fields all through the year, pay nazarana (presents in kind or cash) on the birth day of a child in the family. On occasion of marriage or death in Visnur family every handicraftsman, artisan or merchant had to pay a certain portion of his produce or fixed amounts in cash. Cobbler should present shoes and harness; shepherds should present Kamblies and also supply sheep and goats for the feast and free milk too. And peasants, grain, vegetables etc. He built a house costing Rs. 200, in the thirties and forties, out of which nearly half the cost was collected in cash from the forced labour for various construction jobs. A young mother, who had delivered a child only three days earlier, was made to do forced labor in his fields, leaving the infant with nobody to look after and the child died because of lack of feed and care. He was so notorious that peasants hesitated to give their daughters in marriage to persons living in those villages. It was against such forced labour and illegal exaction and eviction that the Andhra Mahasabha, rebelled. The beginnings of the Telangana armed struggle were against, the atrocities of this very same Visnur *Deshmukh* in 1946, when his goondas attacked and murdered Doddi Komarayya, the local Andhra Mahasabha worker in Kadivendi village on July 4.¹⁰ The Bhagela system was yet another form of oppression. The origin of a bhagela was typically that of a landless members of one of the lower castes, often from untouchable caste, who would be obliged to offer her or his labour as security for debts and work for the creditor until the debt was repaid. For instance it often happened that when a man married, involving considerable expense, he would become a Bhagela, while his wife would work as an agricultural labourer (when she could) and support them both¹¹ the wages for this work would be deducted as repayments for the loan. But wages were so low and interest so high (usually never less than 25%) that the debt remained perpetually unpaid. When Bhagela died the debt was inherited by his heir, so there were generations of agricultural labourers giving totally unpaid labour to the *Deshmukhs*, which enabled them to cultivate their large holdings paying the most minimal amount in wages.¹²

In 1936 the state Government made a gesture towards reform through the Hyderabad Bhagela Agreement Regulation. As its name implies, the intention was to set out conditions for agreements between Bhagelas and their employers. The main provisions were that interest was to be fixed at 6% and that the agreement was to be rendered void on the death of the Bhagela.¹³ This was not a success. Four years later in the report of the labour census it was stated that the measure had not had much effect yet and in fact no agreements had been registered. This was put down to the Bhagelas having been under an inferiority complex for generations and so being too timid and backward to complain against their all powerful employers.¹⁴ The significance of the movement was the building of a movement which questioned the very basis of the society founded on exploitation, inequality and indignity. It demanded a socio-economic transformation of society.

CONCLUSION

There were three types of land holding systems-sarf-e-khas (the land controlled by Nizam and his family from where revenue were collected used for their personnel expenses) and jagirs (the land which was given to jagirdars) and diwani or government land. Jagirdars were those who were loyal to the Nizam enjoying their own police, revenue, civil and criminal systems. They had received jagirs and become revenue officers or generals in the army. They also had right over forest and fisheries, and exercised police and judicial functions. Having all the power they compelled people to various illegal exactions and forced labours. The peoples' conditions of jagir areas were far more oppressed than in the sarf-e-khas lands; the jagirdars and their agents were free to collect a variety of illegal taxes from the actual cultivators. Jagir lands were even above the jurisdiction of civil courts. There was also the vetti (free services to the proprietors) system. Every peasant was compelled to contribute vetti to the zamindar. Only after completing operations the landlord's fields, peasants and labourers could work for themselves.

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